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ABSTRACT

This study examined the impact of awareness workshops component of the West Point/Mississippi State University Enrichment Project for parents of junior high school students who had experienced academic failure or behavior problems. Focusing on effective parenting skills and conducted by graduate students divided into three total quality management teams, the 5-week summer intervention covered topics including: (1) helping your child develop self confidence; (2) instilling a love of reading in your child; (3) creating a home setting conducive to learning; (4) creating opportunities for learning; (5) showing your child that school is important; and (6) communicating with your child on a regular basis. Sixty-six parents completed the post-intervention survey instrument. All indicated that the workshops were helpful, and that they would recommend the project and workshops to other parents. Some of their suggestions for improvement included involving children in the workshops, involving ministers and more male parents, and including workshops on drug awareness. (Twenty-four references are included.) (SM)

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INCREASING PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN CHILDREN'S EDUCATION THROUGH AWARENESS WORKSHOPS

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Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the
Mid-South Educational Research Association

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The West Point/Mississippi State University Enrichment Project was an intensive five week summer intervention project involving 117 at-risk students. The project was developed for students who had experienced academic failure and behavior problems during the school year. The parents of these students were invited to participate in the parent component of the project.

Parents were encouraged to participate in awareness workshops which emphasized affective parenting skills. The workshops were presented by graduate students enrolled in a combined elementary principalship and secondary principalship class. The graduate students in the class were divided into three total quality management (TQM) teams. The objectives of the three groups were to organize and present workshops for parents. The workshops addressed the following topics:

1. helping your child develop self-confidence
2. instilling a love for reading in your child
3. creating a home setting conducive to learning
4. creating opportunities for learning
5. showing your child that school is important

6. letting your children know that you have high hopes for their earning good grades in school
7. communicating with your child on a daily basis
8. teaching your child values
9. showing concern for the health of your child
10. using a warm, guiding, parenting style.

The workshops were presented using videos, skits, songs, lecture, overhead, transparencies, and handouts.

Statement of the Problem

The purpose of this study was to determine whether or not the awareness workshops component of the West Point/Mississippi State University Enrichment Project had a positive affect on parents.

Research Questions

At the conclusion of the workshops, parents were asked to respond to the following questions which were used as a guide for the study.

1. Were the workshops helpful to parents?
2. Would parents recommend that other parents get involved in a project like the West Point/Mississippi State University Enrichment Project?
3. Would parents recommend the workshops to other parents?

4. Parent comments on "What they would like to see included in other workshops and suggestions for improvement?".

Parent Involvement Literature Review

Vandergrif & Greene (1993) stated that parent involvement has two key elements: that parents be supportive with their encouragement and understanding and that parents be active. They stated that the degree of involvement falls along a continuum.

1. At one end are parents who are both supportive and willing to participate. They are likely to attend workshops and conferences, respond to notes and phone calls, and get involved in decision-making roles through advisory committees and planning teams.

2. Some parents simply are not joiners, even though they may care deeply about their child's education.

3. Perhaps a rarer parent--and the most difficult type to identify--is the one who pays lip service to education by attending events, but is not supportive at home.

4. Parents who are not supportive and do not participate are the most difficult to reach, but perhaps the most important group on which to focus efforts (pp. 19-20).

Hollifield (1993) suggest six methods in which policies at all levels are coordinated to help schools reach out and form effective family, community and school collaborations.

1. School help for families--schools assisting families in relation to the families' basic obligations.

2. School-home communication--the basic obligation of schools to communicate from school to home about school programs and children's progress.

3. Family help for schools--involvement in school of parent and community volunteers who assist teachers, administrators, and children in classrooms and other school areas.

4. Involvement in learning activities at home--parent-initiated or child-initiated requests for help and particularly, ideas from teachers for parents to monitor or assist their own children at home in learning activities that can be coordinated with the children's classroom instruction.

5. Involvement in governance, decision making, and advocacy--parents and other community residents advisor, decision-making, or advocacy roles in parent associations, advisory committees, and school improvement or school site councils.

6. Collaboration and exchanges with the community---involvement of any of the institutions that share some responsibility for children's development and success (p. 11).

Teachers can improve their partnership with parents by writing letters to parents (Manning & Manning, 1993). Blendinger and Jones (1992) stated that letters and notes from teachers provide an excellent means for developing and maintaining communication with parents. They further suggest "good news" calls to parents from the teacher (or

principal) to recognize the child for something well done which do much to promote positive attitudes and enhance relations.

According to Schurr (1993), parents and educators are often victims of outdated perceptions that put up barriers to home-school communications. Schurr stated that administrators might consider seven common elements identified by the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory in a study of promising parent involvement programs:

1. a written policy that legitimizes the importance of parent involvement
2. administrative support represented by allocation of dollars, space, and people power
3. training focused on communication and partnering skills for parents and staff members
4. emphasis on partnership philosophy that creates a feeling of mutual ownership in the education of students
5. a two-way communication structure that occurs regularly and consistently
6. networking that facilitates the sharing of information, resources, and technical expertise
7. regular evaluation activities that try to modify program components as needed (p. 4).

Schurr suggest 16 proven parent involvement strategies.

1. Mutual goal setting contracting, and evaluating.
2. Assessment of school policies and practices.
3. Parent lounge/center/resource room.
4. Public information displays, public service messages, and work-site seminars.
5. Parent handbook of guidelines and tips.
6. Weekend or evening public information fair.
7. Parent and student exchange day.
8. Extra academic credit for parent involvement.
9. An old-fashioned family night at school.
10. Schoolwide communication plan.
11. Parent/teacher dialogue journals for communication.
12. Official parent proclamation efforts.
13. Monthly home-achievement packets.
14. Home visits for a special bond.
15. Schoolwide homework policy.
16. Meet-and-Greet program (pp. 5-8).

Our nation's public schools often serve as surrogate parents. In response to this need, the Mill Hill school district developed a parent involvement program that was selected best in the state by the New Jersey School Boards Association. Part of the assistance includes referring families in need to the Division of Youth and

Family Services, Family Enrichment, Heat Start, Child Find, day care, and camps for regular and special needs students, along with providing throat-culture service through a school nurse and a fluoride treatment program. The parent involvement program helps parents help themselves, establishing an environment in which parents and the school system are partners. The program works on two levels. First, it involves parents with the school and teacher to assist their child's education and reinforce it as home. Second, it gets parents involved not only in their own child's education but in the school as a whole to provide the best education possible to all students (Palestis, 1993).

One way to help teachers get parents involved in education is to use videotapes to show busy parents their students in action (Wherry, 1992). November (1992) suggested school bulletins, TV homework and family workshops to begin helping parents become more personally involved with home technologies for learning.

Research indicated that parent involvement in schools results in improved student achievement (Loucks, 1992). Parent involvement in school can lead to improved

student achievement, increased school attendance and decreased delinquency (Pantiel, 1992).

Merttens (1993) suggested that homework makes more of an impact on students if the rest of the family joins in. Teachers need to provide guidance to parents concerning helping their children with homework (Schumm, 1992). According to Kardon (1992), when parents take more responsibility for their children's homework than their children do, it becomes the bane of the parents' existence. When a kid brings home an assignment from school many parents jump in with both feet. However, it is important for parents to remember just whose project it is (Maynard, 1992). The best strategies a parent can use in getting a child to seriously approach school work is reading instructions aloud together, forming questions to ask the teacher and setting time aside for study (Shanok, 1992). Parents can effectively help their children with homework by following a routine, teaching the child responsibility and restraining from doing the homework for the child (LaForge & McClain, 1992).

The following are tips for parents who want to help their children with homework form the National Center for Learning Disabilities (Francis, 1993).

1. Find a regular place at home for your child to do homework.

2. Make sure the work area has ample lighting, a minimum of noise, and a place for books and supplies.

3. Eliminate distractions during study time.

4. Encourage your child to establish a regular time to do homework.

5. Show an interest in your child's homework.

6. Try to relate the homework to the child's everyday life.

7. Coach your child with unknown work or difficult problem, but don't actually do the homework.

8. Praise your child for successfully completing homework assignments.

9. Carefully observe how your child is studying at home.

10. If a child strongly dislikes or has trouble completing homework, find out why (p. 226)

Parents should set aside a specific time for homework to be done and outline their expectations at the beginning of the school year (Elkind, 1993).

Total Quality Management (TQM) Literature Review

Marchese (1992) stated that there is no single "it" behind the Total Quality Management (TQM) label. Marchese stated that what you find instead is a bag of ideas and tools from a variety of sources--systems

theory, humanistic psychology, statistics, common sense--in a loose "movement" for work place transformation. He further stated that the newcomers want a tidy formula or tidy definition, but TQM is more complex than that.

Blendinger (1993) states that TQM schools are guided by the following set of core beliefs:

1. Customer satisfaction--ask the customer.
2. Quality standards--doing things right the first time.
3. Empowerment--delegating authority and responsibility.
4. Principal/teacher/staff relationships based on respect, trust, and shared decision making.
5. Investment in staff development.

Holpp (1992) stated that in an organization that chooses a TQM intervention the following occurs:

1. Employees work within traditional job description, meeting as teams only for problem solving.
2. Teams use quality techniques (root-cause analysis, for example) to identify and analyze problems.
3. Problem solutions are not necessarily linked to overall business strategy.
4. Traditional supervisor-employee reporting relationships remain in force.
5. Performance management is a one-on-one activity.

6. Organization wide policies and procedures apply across the board.

7. Employees control their own work schedules.

8. Workers deal directly with people at all levels of the organization, vendors and customers.

9. The team manages a budget.

10. Teams "own" the whole job and take responsibility or productivity, cost and quality.

11. Work is characterized by tremendous flexibility. Nontraditional roles are adopted by various team members.

12. Team members are empowered to make major changes in their work processes without going through levels of approval (pp. 71-72).

McMillen, (1991), stated that TQM is a relatively simply concept that centers on what administrators call "continuous improvement". The main tool is employee teams, where people who actually do the work come up with suggestions for improvements. Their ideas are based on reaction from "customers", faculty members, students, and groups that use a service.

In Summary, schools need to develop multiple strategies geared to the needs of the families and communities they serve. Homework makes more of an impact on students if the rest of the family participate in the assignment. There is no single "it" behind the Total

Quality Management (TQM) label. TQM is relatively a simple concept that centers on what administrators call "continuous improvement" where ideas are based on reaction from "customers", faculty members, students, and groups that use a service. TQM schools are guided by the a set of core beliefs. The main tool is employee teams, where people who actually do the work come up with suggestions for improvements.

Therefore, the literature suggested that enough evidence exist to merit a study of a project that includes parent workshops using total quality management in the school. The literature suggested that TQM teams can be used in the schools to help with improving parent involvement.

Research Procedures and Findings

Parents in the West Point/Mississippi State University project were surveyed and asked to give their opinion of the project using a three point dichotomous scale addressing the following:

1. Helpfulness of the Workshops.
2. Recommending the Project to Other Parents.
3. Recommending the Workshops to Other Parents.
4. Parent comments.

The subjects in this study were delimited to the parents of the 117 at-risk students and the 30 graduate students in the West Point/Mississippi State University Enrichment Project. The data was summarized and statistically treated using chi-square tests at the .05 level of significance for each of the three research questions. Sixty-six of 117 parents completed instruments. In questions one through three, there were two categories. One meant yes and two meant no. Three questions were formulated.

1. Were the workshops helpful to parents?

The findings in question one were statistically significant between the choices of parents as to whether the workshops were helpful. Sixty-six (100%) parents indicated that the workshops were helpful to them. None indicated that the workshops were not helpful.

Table 1

Chi-Square Goodness of Fit Test
on the Helpfulness of the Workshops

Category (Class)	Observed Freq. (Oi)	Expected Freq. (Ei)	$(Oi-Ei)^2/Ei$
Yes	66.0	33.0	33.00
No	0.0	33.0	33.00
TOTAL	66.0	66.0	66.00

$X^2 = 66.00$

D. F. = 1

2. Would parents recommend to other parents a project like the West Point/Mississippi State University Enrichment Project?

The findings in question two were statistically significant between the choices of parents as to whether they would recommend the project to other parents. Sixty-six parents (100%) indicated that they would recommend to other parents a project like the West Point/Mississippi State University Enrichment Project. None indicated that they would not recommend the project to other parents.

Table 2

Chi-Square Goodness of Fit Test
on Recommending the Project to Other Parents

Category (Class)	Observed Freq. (Oi)	Expected Freq. (Ei)	$(Oi-Ei)^2/Ei$
Yes	66.0	33.0	33.00
No	0.0	33.0	33.00
TOTAL	66.0	66.0	66.00

$X^2 = 66.00$

D. F. = 1

3. Would parents recommend these workshops to other parents?

The findings in question three were statistically significant between the choices of parents recommending the workshops to other parents. Sixty-six parents (100%) indicated that they would recommend the workshops to other parents. None indicated that they would not recommend the workshops to other parents.

Table 3

Chi-Square Goodness of Fit Test
on Recommending the Workshops to Other Parents

Category (Class)	Observed Freq. (Oi)	Expected Freq. (Ei)	$(Oi-Ei)^2/Ei$
Yes	66.0	33.0	33.00
No	0.0	33.0	33.00
TOTAL	66.0	66.0	66.00

$X^2 = 66.00$

D. F. = 1

4. Parent comments on "What they would like to see included in other workshops and suggestions for improvement?".

The parents responded as follows to item four. VP denotes a very positive response and P denotes positive response.

"Everything was read nice and explained real good and could not have been better"--VP.

"I really enjoyed the skits that were performed. I found them enriching and helpful"--VP.

"I really enjoyed everything in the workshop and it was real nice"--VP.

"I wish that this had been held in possibly the auditorium so that the children could have been involved in the meetings. I believe this would have been helpful for them also. I appreciate all this group has done"--VP.

"I would like to see more one on one parent and student communications involvement"--P.

"I would like to see my child and other students included. Sometimes others can reach them when you can't"--P.

"Maybe some student involvement"--P.

"Have more illustrations on home values concerning children and parents relationships. Have ministers to get involved"--P.

"I would like to see a workshop done on drugs. Making our children aware of the different types of drugs that's in our society. I have enjoyed being in this workshop"--VP.

"I think that the workshop was very helpful to me and I don't see nothing I will do different. Thank all of you very much"--VP.

"I don't see how it could have been better"--VP.

"This is the best project for parents and young adults. I wish that there could have been workshops available when I was raising my other children"--VP.

"The same thing"--VP.

"More men"--P.

"More skits"--P.

Since nine (60%) of the 15 responses were very positive and six (40%) of the 15 responses were positive, all general responses were considered positive. Further, the parents would like to see the following in another workshop:

1. handouts, lecture, overheads, skits, songs, transparencies, and videos.

2. Their children are included in the workshops.

3. More one-on-one parent and student communications involvement.

4. More illustrations on home values concerning children and parent relationships.

5. Involvement of ministers.

6. Drug awareness workshops.

7. Involvement of more men parents

Conclusion

Based on the sample studied, it can be concluded that the awareness workshops component of the West Point/Mississippi State University Enrichment Project had a positive affect on the parents of the junior high school students. Total Quality Management Teams are an affective method to use in conducting workshops for parents. It can further be concluded that the parents perceived the workshops as being helpful, worthy of being recommended to other parents, and a tool that should be replicated in future summers.

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